

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR VOCATIONAL GROWTH SESSIONS (VGS)

Missionary Situation for Reflection

A Conversation That Changed Nothing

Brother James had been in formation for nearly three years. Every month he faithfully attended his Vocational Growth Session with his formator. Each meeting followed the same pattern. The formator asked, “How are you?” James replied, “I’m fine.” They briefly discussed studies, community life, prayer, and apostolic work. The formator offered a few words of encouragement and reminded him to remain faithful to his commitments. The session usually ended within thirty minutes. Months passed, yet very little seemed to change. James continued struggling with punctuality, avoided community dialogue, and became discouraged whenever he received correction. Although he attended every session, he rarely spoke about what he truly felt. The formator assumed that James had little to share because he was naturally quiet.

During a community workshop on self-awareness, James unexpectedly remarked, “I have attended many VGS, but I have never felt that anyone really helped me understand myself.” His words surprised the formation team. They realized that the sessions had become routine conversations rather than moments of genuine accompaniment. The formator had listened politely but seldom explored the deeper motivations behind James’ behaviour. Difficult topics were often avoided, and the sessions usually ended with advice rather than reflection.

The following year, another formator began accompanying James. Instead of beginning with questions about activities, he invited James to speak about what was happening within him. He listened patiently, reflected back what he heard, and gently asked deeper questions. Over time, James recognized that much of his discouragement was rooted in a long-standing fear of failure and an excessive need for approval. As he became more aware of these patterns, he gradually learned to respond more freely and responsibly.

James later commented, “For the first time, I felt that someone was helping me read my own life.”

Reflection

- What made the second formator’s accompaniment more effective than the first?
- How easily can Vocational Growth Sessions become routine conversations?
- What practical habits help a formator move from giving advice to facilitating genuine growth?

Formation Note: Vocational Growth Sessions are among the most important instruments of personalized formation. Their purpose is not merely to review behaviour or solve problems, but to help the formandus understand himself more deeply, integrate his human and spiritual life, and respond more freely to God’s call. Their effectiveness depends less on the number of meetings than on the quality of listening, reflection, and discernment that takes place within them. A well-conducted VGS becomes a privileged space where the formandus learns to interpret his life in the light of faith and gradually grows in freedom, responsibility, and vocational maturity.

Introduction

The previous module explored the theological, spiritual, and psychological foundations of accompaniment in formation. It emphasized that accompaniment is a privileged ministry through which the formator walks with the formandus, helping him grow in self-knowledge, personal integration, vocational discernment, and missionary maturity.

This module builds on those foundations by focusing on one of the principal means through which accompaniment is carried out: **Vocational Growth Sessions (VGS)**. Rather than discussing the theory of accompaniment, it provides practical guidance on preparing, conducting, and following up these one-to-one encounters.

Vocational Growth Sessions are not interviews to evaluate performance, nor are they occasions to solve every problem or give ready-made advice. They are structured conversations that help the formandus reflect on his experiences, recognize the deeper motivations behind his attitudes and behaviours, discern God's action in his life, and identify practical steps for continued growth.

The effectiveness of these sessions depends less on sophisticated psychological techniques than on the formator's ability to listen attentively, ask meaningful questions, foster honest reflection, and accompany the formandus with patience, respect, and discernment. When conducted regularly and thoughtfully, Vocational Growth Sessions become privileged moments where human growth, spiritual maturity, and vocational commitment gradually converge.

The practical guidelines presented in this module are intended especially for formators who accompany formandi in their ordinary formation journey. They offer a simple, practical framework that can be adapted to different stages of formation and cultural contexts while remaining faithful to the goal of forming mature missionaries who respond to God's call with freedom, responsibility, and generosity.

I. Preparing for a Vocational Growth Session

Vocational Growth Sessions begin long before the formator and the formandus sit down together. A fruitful session depends not only on what happens during the conversation but also on the formator's preparation. Entering a session prayerfully, attentively, and without preconceived judgments enables the formator to accompany the formandus with greater freedom and sensitivity.

Preparation is not about planning solutions or deciding in advance what the formandus needs to hear. Rather, it is about becoming available to listen, discern, and respond to the person's unique journey. Every session should therefore begin with an attitude of openness—to the Holy Spirit, to the formandus, and to the gradual process of growth.

1. Prepare Yourself Interiorly

Before each session, take a few moments to become inwardly present.

- Begin with a brief prayer, asking for wisdom, humility, and the grace to listen with the heart.
- Set aside personal distractions, concerns, or judgments.
- Remember that your role is not to control or solve every problem, but to accompany the formandus in discovering God's action in his life.

A calm and prayerful presence often communicates more than many words.

2. Review the Previous Journey

Continuity is essential for meaningful accompaniment. Before the meeting, briefly review your notes from the previous session.

Pay attention to:

- the main themes discussed;
- the commitments the formandus made;
- areas that required further reflection;
- significant observations since the last meeting.

Following up on previous conversations shows genuine interest and helps the formandus recognize that growth is a continuous journey rather than a series of isolated conversations.

3. Observe Without Judging

Daily community life provides many opportunities to understand the formandus beyond the VGS itself. Quiet observation helps the formator identify areas that may deserve reflection.

Notice, for example:

- participation in community life;
- relationships with others;
- emotional reactions;
- approach to prayer and apostolic responsibilities;
- signs of growth or recurring struggles.

These observations should never become labels or premature conclusions. They simply provide starting points for dialogue. What is observed externally should always be explored respectfully with the formandus rather than assumed to be the whole truth.

4. Create the Right Disposition

Every formandus is unique. Avoid entering the session with fixed expectations or predetermined conclusions.

Instead of asking, *“How can I correct him?”* ask, *“What is God inviting this person to discover at this stage of his formation?”*

This shift changes the session from evaluation to accompaniment.

Practical Checklist Before Every VGS

Before beginning the session, ask yourself:

- ✓ Have I prayed for this meeting?
- ✓ Have I reviewed the previous session?
- ✓ Do I remember the commitments made last time?
- ✓ Am I emotionally present and ready to listen?
- ✓ Am I free from prejudgments or personal frustrations?
- ✓ Am I prepared to accompany rather than simply advise?

Formation Note: Good accompaniment begins with the formator’s own disposition. Candidates usually remember less of what was said than how they were received. A formator who is prayerful, attentive, and genuinely interested creates an atmosphere where honesty, trust, and growth can flourish. Preparing well is therefore not an administrative task but an essential part of the ministry of accompaniment.

II. Creating the Right Environment

A Vocational Growth Session is most fruitful when it takes place in an atmosphere of trust, respect, and attentive presence. The quality of the environment often determines the quality of the conversation. If the formandus feels safe, respected, and free from distractions, he is more likely to speak honestly about his experiences and struggles.

Creating the right environment involves more than selecting a suitable room. It requires establishing regularity, ensuring privacy, respecting confidentiality, and giving the formandus the confidence that this time is dedicated to his personal and vocational growth.

1. Meet Regularly

Vocational Growth Sessions should be a normal and integral part of the formation process, not something reserved for times of crisis.

As a general guideline:

- **Ideally:** every two weeks.
- **At minimum:** once a month.

Regular meetings communicate that personal accompaniment is a priority. They also help the formator and the formandus follow the journey of growth with continuity instead of dealing only with isolated problems.

2. Choose a Suitable Place

The setting should encourage openness and concentration. The meeting place should be:

- quiet and free from interruptions;
- sufficiently private to ensure confidentiality;
- comfortable without becoming overly casual;
- conducive to calm conversation and reflection.

Avoid conducting Vocational Growth Sessions in public places, dining halls, corridors, or while walking between activities. Such settings rarely allow the depth of conversation that genuine accompaniment requires.

3. Respect the Time

A typical session should last **45 to 60 minutes**. This is generally sufficient to explore one or two significant themes without rushing the conversation or causing unnecessary fatigue.

Both the formator and the formandus should arrive punctually and avoid ending the session prematurely except for unavoidable reasons. Giving adequate time communicates respect for the person and the process.

4. Eliminate Distractions

The formator's full attention is one of the greatest gifts he can offer.

During the session:

- silence or switch off mobile phones;
- avoid checking messages or answering calls;
- do not allow unnecessary interruptions;
- remain fully present throughout the conversation.

When the formandus experiences undivided attention, he recognizes that his journey truly matters.

5. Build a Climate of Trust

Trust develops gradually through consistency and respectful accompaniment.

The formandus should know that:

- he is free to speak honestly;
- he will be listened to without ridicule or unnecessary judgment;
- his personal sharing will be treated with discretion;
- difficult questions can be explored patiently without pressure.

Trust cannot be demanded; it is earned through repeated experiences of respectful listening and faithful accompaniment.

6. Respect Confidentiality

Confidentiality is essential for authentic Vocational Growth Sessions. Personal information shared during accompaniment should never become the subject of casual conversation within the community.

At the same time, the formator should explain from the beginning that confidentiality is not absolute. If serious concerns arise involving safeguarding, abuse, risk of self-harm, or other situations requiring responsible intervention, appropriate action must be taken according to the policies and procedures of the Church and the institute.

Being transparent about these limits strengthens rather than weakens trust.

Practical Tips

Before every session:

- Arrange the meeting in advance.
- Begin and end on time.
- Ensure privacy.
- Keep all distractions away.
- Give the formandus your full attention.
- Treat every meeting as a privileged moment of accompaniment, not simply another item on the daily schedule.

Formation Note: The environment does not replace good accompaniment, but it creates the conditions in which accompaniment can flourish. A regular schedule, a quiet setting, respectful listening, and responsible confidentiality communicate to the formandus that he is valued as a person. Such an atmosphere encourages honest dialogue and allows Vocational Growth Sessions to become genuine moments of discernment, integration, and vocational growth.

III. The Flow of a Vocational Growth Session

While every formandus is unique and every conversation develops differently, Vocational Growth Sessions are most effective when they follow a simple and consistent flow. A clear structure helps the formator remain focused, prevents the conversation from becoming scattered, and ensures that each session moves from sharing to reflection, discernment, and practical growth.

The following eight-step process is not a rigid formula but a flexible guide that can be adapted according to the needs of the formandus and the stage of formation.

Step 1. Welcome and Create a Climate of Trust

Begin the session warmly and naturally. A few moments of informal conversation can help the formandus relax and settle into the meeting.

Simple opening questions may include:

- “How have you been since our last meeting?”
- “What has been most significant for you these days?”
- “How would you describe your present state of mind?”

The purpose is not to gather information immediately but to help the formandus feel welcomed and ready for honest conversation.

Step 2. Invite the Formandus to Share

Allow the formandus to identify what is most important for him at this moment.

Helpful questions include:

- “What would you like us to reflect on today?”
- “What has brought you joy recently?”
- “What has been most challenging for you?”
- “Has anything happened that you are still carrying within you?”

Resist the temptation to direct the conversation too quickly. Often the most important issues emerge naturally when the formandus feels listened to.

Step 3. Listen Deeply

As the formandus shares, give him your full attention.

Listen for:

- facts and experiences;
- emotions behind the words;
- recurring themes;
- hopes, fears, and struggles;
- what remains unsaid.

Avoid interrupting unnecessarily. Silence often allows deeper reflection and should not be filled immediately with advice or additional questions.

Step 4. Explore More Deeply

Once the main issue has emerged, gently help the formandus look beneath the surface. Questions such as these often deepen reflection:

- “How did that experience affect you?”
- “What do you think was happening within you?”
- “Have you experienced something similar before?”
- “Why do you think this situation affected you so strongly?”

The aim is not to analyse every experience but to help the formandus recognize the motivations, feelings, and attitudes that influence his responses.

Step 5. Discern Together

After exploring the experience, help the formandus interpret it in the light of his vocation. Questions for discernment may include:

- “What is this experience teaching you?”
- “What value is being challenged here?”
- “Where do you sense God inviting you to grow?”

- “How does this relate to your vocational journey?”

This step helps the formandus move from simply describing events to discovering their formative meaning.

Step 6. Identify One Practical Step

Growth becomes lasting when insight is translated into action. Rather than making many resolutions, encourage the formandus to identify one realistic step before the next session.

For example:

- dedicating more time to personal prayer;
- initiating dialogue with a community member;
- practicing greater patience in a recurring situation;
- maintaining a simple daily examination of conscience.

Small and consistent steps usually produce deeper growth than ambitious resolutions that are difficult to sustain.

Step 7. Summarize the Conversation

Before concluding, briefly review what has emerged during the session.

A simple summary might include:

- the main issue discussed;
- the insights gained;
- the practical commitment agreed upon.

This ensures that both the formator and the formandus leave the meeting with a common understanding of what has been discovered and what will be followed up.

Step 8. Close with Encouragement

End the session positively.

Express appreciation for the formandus’ openness and encourage him to continue the journey with hope.

When appropriate, conclude with a brief prayer, entrusting the conversation and the commitment made to the Lord.

A peaceful and encouraging conclusion helps the formandus leave the session feeling accompanied rather than evaluated.

Practical Session Flow

Step	Purpose
1. Welcome	Create trust and openness
2. Invite Sharing	Identify significant experiences
3. Listen Deeply	Understand the person beyond the facts
4. Explore	Discover deeper feelings and motivations
5. Discern	Interpret the experience in the light of vocation
6. Practical Step	Translate insight into concrete action
7. Summarize	Reinforce learning and commitment
8. Close	Encourage hope and continuity

Formation Note: A Vocational Growth Session is not an interview, a performance evaluation, or a problem-solving exercise. It is a journey of accompaniment that gradually leads the formandus from experience to reflection, from reflection to discernment, and from discernment to concrete growth. A simple and consistent structure enables the formator to accompany with confidence while allowing the Holy Spirit to guide each conversation according to the unique needs of the formandus.

IV. Essential Skills Every Formator Needs

The effectiveness of a Vocational Growth Session depends less on the formator's knowledge of psychology than on his ability to accompany the formandus with attentiveness, wisdom, and discernment. While certain techniques can be learned, they become fruitful only when they are exercised within a relationship of respect, trust, and genuine concern for the person's growth.

The following skills form the foundation of effective accompaniment. They can be developed through practice, reflection, and experience.

1. Listen More Than You Speak

Listening is the most important skill in accompaniment. A formandus often discovers the deeper meaning of his experiences while speaking, not while receiving advice.

Good listening means giving the formandus your full attention without preparing your next response while he is speaking. It involves listening not only to words but also to emotions, hesitations, and silences.

A helpful guideline is simple: *Seek first to understand before trying to be understood.*

Ask yourself:

- What is he saying?
- What is he feeling?
- What is he not saying?
- What might this experience mean for him?

Often, the most helpful response is not another question but a moment of attentive silence.

2. Ask Questions That Invite Reflection

Good questions help the formandus think more deeply about his experiences instead of simply describing events.

Rather than asking questions that require only "yes" or "no" answers, invite reflection.

For example: Instead of "*Did you pray regularly?*" ask "*How has your prayer been these days?*"

Instead of "*Were you angry?*" ask "*What were you experiencing at that moment?*"

Questions should open doors rather than close them.

3. Reflect What You Hear

Reflection assures the formandus that he has been understood and often helps him clarify his own thoughts.

For example:

Formandus: *“I feel that nobody in the community really listens to me.”*

Instead of immediately offering advice, the formator might respond: *“You seem to feel overlooked and disappointed.”*

The formandus may then reply, *“Yes... but perhaps I also expect too much from others.”*

Notice that the insight comes from the formandus himself.

Reflection encourages self-discovery rather than dependence on the formator.

4. Use Silence Wisely

Many formators feel uncomfortable with silence and rush to fill every pause with another question or explanation.

However, silence often allows the formandus to:

- think more deeply;
- recognize his emotions;
- find words for difficult experiences;
- arrive at personal insights.

Do not be afraid of brief moments of silence. Sometimes they are the most fruitful part of the session.

5. Give Feedback Gently

There are times when the formator needs to offer observations that may help the formandus see aspects of himself that he has overlooked.

Such feedback should always be:

- respectful;
- specific;
- based on observable behaviour;
- offered for growth rather than criticism.

Instead of saying, *“You are irresponsible.”* say, *“I have noticed that you have arrived late several times this month. What do you think is contributing to this?”*

Describe behaviour rather than judge the person.

6. Encourage Responsibility

The purpose of accompaniment is not to solve problems for the formandus but to help him grow in responsible freedom.

Rather than providing immediate solutions, encourage him to discover his own.

Helpful questions include:

- “What do you think would be the next right step?”
- “How would you like to respond to this situation?”
- “What have you learned from this experience?”

When the formandus discovers his own response, he is more likely to take ownership of it.

Practical Tips

During every VGS:

- Listen more than you speak.
- Ask one good question rather than many quick ones.
- Allow silence.
- Reflect feelings before offering advice.
- Describe behaviour instead of judging character.
- Encourage the formandus to take responsibility for his own growth.

Formation Note: A skilled formator is not the one who has all the answers but the one who helps the formandus discover the truth about himself in the presence of God. Listening, reflective questioning, thoughtful feedback, and patient silence create the conditions in which authentic growth becomes possible. These skills transform Vocational Growth Sessions from ordinary conversations into privileged moments of discernment and formation.

V. Reading What Lies Beneath: Recognizing Defence Mechanisms and Resistance

In every Vocational Growth Session, the formator listens not only to **what the formandus says** but also to **how he says it**. Sometimes the real issue is hidden beneath the surface. A formandus may avoid certain topics, minimize painful experiences, blame others, or explain everything intellectually. These are often natural ways of protecting himself from emotional discomfort.

Such reactions should not be viewed as signs of failure or lack of sincerity. They are usually unconscious attempts to cope with anxiety, fear, shame, or unresolved experiences. The role of the formator is not to expose or confront these patterns abruptly, but to recognize them and gently help the formandus become more aware of them.

Common Patterns You May Notice

If the formandus...	It may indicate...	A helpful response...
Speaks about painful events without any emotion	He may be protecting himself from painful feelings.	"How did that experience affect you personally?"
Gives logical explanations for everything	He may be avoiding deeper emotions.	"What were you feeling at that moment?"
Frequently blames others	He may not yet recognize his own contribution to the situation.	"How do you see your part in what happened?"
Insists that nothing is wrong despite recurring difficulties	He may find it difficult to acknowledge the problem.	"Others have noticed this pattern. How do you understand it?"
Avoids sensitive topics or quickly changes the subject	The topic may be emotionally difficult or threatening.	"I notice this seems difficult to speak about. Would you like to take your time with it?"

The purpose of these questions is not to challenge or embarrass the formandus but to invite deeper self-awareness.

Recognizing Resistance

Resistance is another common experience during accompaniment. It occurs when the formandus consciously or unconsciously avoids exploring areas that evoke discomfort or vulnerability.

Resistance often appears when the conversation approaches significant issues such as family relationships, emotional wounds, vocational doubts, personal failures, or unresolved conflicts.

Some common signs include:

- “I have nothing to talk about today.”
- prolonged silence;
- arriving late for sessions;
- giving very brief answers;
- repeatedly changing the subject;
- speaking only about external events while avoiding personal feelings.

Rather than becoming frustrated, the formator should recognize resistance as a sign that the conversation may be approaching an important area of growth.

Responding to Resistance

When resistance appears:

- remain calm and patient;
- avoid forcing the conversation;
- acknowledge what you observe without judgment;
- invite, rather than pressure, the formandus to continue reflecting;
- allow silence when needed.

For example: Instead of saying, “*You never tell me anything.*” say, “*I notice that today it seems difficult to speak about what is happening within you. Would you like to tell me what makes this conversation difficult?*”

This response respects the freedom of the formandus while encouraging honest reflection.

When to Wait

Not every silence needs to be broken immediately.

Sometimes the most helpful accompaniment is simply remaining present.

Growth often requires time. A formandus may need several sessions before he feels ready to speak about experiences that are deeply personal or emotionally painful.

Patient accompaniment communicates: “*I am willing to walk with you at your pace.*”

Practical Tips

When you notice resistance or defensive patterns:

- Stay curious rather than critical.
- Explore gently instead of confronting abruptly.
- Focus on understanding rather than correcting.
- Respect the person’s pace of growth.
- Pray for the wisdom to discern when to speak and when to remain silent.

Remember: *Defence mechanisms protect the person; accompaniment helps the person gradually outgrow the need for them.*

Formation Note: Resistance and defence mechanisms are not obstacles to accompaniment but invitations to deeper accompaniment. They often point to areas where the formandus carries fear, unresolved emotions, or personal vulnerability. A patient and discerning formator does not try to remove these protections immediately but accompanies the formandus until he is able to face his own

truth with greater freedom. Such accompaniment fosters emotional maturity, personal integration, and a more authentic response to God's call.

VI. Helping the Formandus Grow: From Insight to Action

The purpose of a Vocational Growth Session is not simply to help the formandus understand himself better but to help him grow. Insight becomes transformative only when it leads to concrete changes in attitudes, choices, and behaviour. The formator therefore accompanies the formandus from self-awareness to responsible action, helping him translate reflection into daily living.

Growth is usually gradual. Rather than expecting immediate change, the formator encourages small but consistent steps that, over time, lead to deeper personal integration and vocational maturity.

1. Help the Formandus Recognize the Value at Stake

Behind every experience lies an invitation to grow in a particular value.

For example:

- A conflict with a community member may invite growth in forgiveness or dialogue.
- Difficulty accepting correction may point to humility or openness.
- Irregular prayer may reveal the need to deepen one's relationship with God.
- Resistance to community responsibilities may call for greater generosity and accountability.

Helping the formandus identify the value involved shifts the focus from solving problems to fostering personal growth.

Useful questions include:

- "What value is God inviting you to grow in through this experience?"
- "What is this situation teaching you about yourself?"
- "What kind of person are you being called to become?"

2. Move from Understanding to Commitment

Understanding a value is only the beginning. Genuine formation occurs when the formandus freely chooses to live that value in concrete situations.

The movement is gradual:

- **Understand** the value.
- **Appreciate** its importance.
- **Practice** it consistently.

For example, a formandus may understand the importance of community dialogue but still avoid difficult conversations. Through accompaniment, he gradually comes to appreciate dialogue as a path to communion and finally chooses to practice it even when it requires courage and humility.

The formator's role is to support this gradual process with patience and encouragement.

3. Encourage One Concrete Resolution

At the end of each session, encourage the formandus to identify one realistic commitment before the next meeting.

The commitment should be:

- simple;

- specific;
- achievable;
- related to the topic discussed.

For example: Instead of: *“I will become a better community member.”* choose: *“This week I will initiate a conversation with the community member with whom I have been avoiding contact.”*

Instead of: *“I will pray more.”* choose: *“I will spend fifteen minutes each morning in silent prayer before beginning my work.”*

Small commitments practiced consistently often produce lasting change.

4. Follow Up at the Next Session

Growth becomes meaningful when commitments are reviewed.

At the beginning of the following session, the formator might ask:

- “How did your commitment go?”
- “What helped you?”
- “What made it difficult?”
- “What did you learn about yourself?”

The purpose is not to evaluate success or failure but to continue the process of learning and growth. Even when a commitment has not been fulfilled, the conversation can reveal important insights about motivations, fears, or obstacles that deserve further reflection.

Practical Tips

Help the formandus:

- identify the value behind the experience;
- make one concrete commitment;
- avoid unrealistic resolutions;
- reflect on progress without discouragement;
- see growth as a gradual journey rather than immediate perfection.

Remember: *Lasting formation usually happens through small, faithful steps rather than dramatic changes.*

Formation Note: The goal of Vocational Growth Sessions is not simply greater self-awareness but greater personal integration. The formandus grows when reflection leads to responsible choices, and repeated choices gradually become stable habits and virtues. By accompanying this process patiently, the formator helps the formandus move from knowing what is good to freely choosing and consistently living it. In this way, human growth and vocational commitment develop together, preparing the formandus for a life of faithful missionary discipleship.

VII. Integrating Human and Spiritual Growth

Vocational Growth Sessions seek the growth of the whole person. Human maturity and spiritual maturity are not two separate journeys but two dimensions of the same vocational response. Emotional struggles influence prayer, relationships, and ministry, just as a deep relationship with God shapes attitudes, decisions, and personal growth.

The formator therefore helps the formandus interpret his experiences both **humanly** and **spiritually**, enabling him to discover how God is working through the ordinary events of daily life.

1. Begin with Human Experience

Every session begins with the lived experience of the formandus.

He may speak about:

- difficulties in community life;
- discouragement in prayer;
- conflicts with authority;
- family concerns;
- fears about the future;
- joys and successes in ministry.

The formator first helps him understand **what happened** and **how he experienced it**, without rushing immediately to spiritual explanations.

Helpful questions include:

- “What happened?”
- “How did you experience that situation?”
- “What were you feeling?”
- “What do you think contributed to your reaction?”

Understanding the human experience provides the foundation for deeper discernment.

2. Explore the Human Dynamics

Once the experience has been described, help the formandus recognize the factors that may be influencing his attitudes and behaviour.

Explore gently:

- emotions;
- personal expectations;
- recurring patterns;
- strengths;
- limitations;
- family or past experiences that may still influence present reactions.

The purpose is not to analyse the person psychologically but to increase self-awareness.

For example, a formandus who reacts strongly to correction may gradually recognize that criticism reminds him of earlier experiences of rejection. Such awareness often reduces defensiveness and opens the way for growth.

3. Discern God’s Invitation

Human insight becomes vocational growth when it is viewed in the light of faith.

Invite the formandus to ask:

- “What might God be teaching me through this experience?”
- “How is this helping me grow?”
- “What Gospel value is being invited here?”
- “How is the Lord calling me to respond?”

This shifts the focus from merely solving a problem to discovering God’s action within the experience.

Even painful situations can become occasions for deeper trust, humility, forgiveness, perseverance, or hope.

4. Encourage an Integrated Response

The goal is not simply to understand the experience but to respond to it with greater freedom and maturity.

An integrated response includes:

- accepting one's emotions without being controlled by them;
- making decisions based on faith and values rather than immediate reactions;
- seeking practical ways to grow;
- remaining open to God's grace throughout the process.

Human effort and God's grace work together in vocational formation.

An Example of Integration

A formandus becomes discouraged after receiving correction from his superior. The conversation may unfold as follows:

Human Reflection

- What happened?
- Why did the correction affect you so deeply?
- What emotions did you experience?
- Have you reacted similarly in other situations?

Spiritual Discernment

- What is God inviting you to learn through this experience?
- Which Gospel value is being challenged?
- How might this experience deepen your vocation?

Practical Response

- What will you do differently next time?
- What grace will you ask for in prayer this week?

In this way, one experience becomes an opportunity for both human and spiritual growth.

Practical Tips

Throughout the session:

- Begin with lived experience.
- Help the formandus understand himself.
- Lead him gradually to spiritual discernment.
- Connect insight with concrete growth.
- Keep Christ and the vocation at the centre of the conversation.

Avoid separating psychological reflection from spiritual reflection. The two illuminate one another.

Formation Note: Vocational Growth Sessions are not primarily psychological interviews or spiritual conferences. They are moments of integral accompaniment where human experience is read in the

light of faith. As the formandus grows in self-awareness, he also becomes more attentive to God's presence and action in his life. This integration gradually forms a person who is emotionally mature, spiritually grounded, and capable of responding to God's call with freedom, generosity, and missionary commitment.

VIII. Evaluating Growth and Following Up

Vocational Growth Sessions are not isolated conversations but part of an ongoing journey of formation. Their effectiveness is measured not by how much is discussed in a single meeting, but by the gradual growth of the formandus over time. The formator should therefore pay attention to signs of progress and regularly follow up on previous conversations and commitments.

Evaluation is not about judging or grading the formandus. Rather, it is a process of discerning how God is working in his life and identifying areas that need further accompaniment.

1. Look for Signs of Growth

Growth is usually gradual and often expressed through small but meaningful changes in attitude and behaviour.

Some positive signs include:

- greater honesty in sharing experiences;
- increased self-awareness;
- greater openness to feedback and correction;
- improved emotional balance;
- healthier relationships within the community;
- deeper commitment to prayer and spiritual practices;
- greater personal responsibility;
- increased vocational clarity and enthusiasm.

These signs indicate that the formandus is gradually integrating his human, spiritual, and vocational life.

2. Recognize Areas That Need Further Attention

Not every struggle indicates a lack of progress. However, recurring patterns may suggest the need for continued accompaniment.

For example:

- repeating the same conflicts without reflection;
- persistent resistance to feedback;
- avoiding responsibility;
- inability to recognize one's own contribution to difficulties;
- inconsistency between expressed values and daily choices;
- lack of follow-through on agreed commitments.

These situations should be explored patiently rather than treated as failures.

3. Review Previous Commitments

Each session should begin by revisiting the commitment made at the previous meeting. Simple questions include:

- "How did your commitment go?"

- “What helped you?”
- “What obstacles did you encounter?”
- “What have you learned since our last conversation?”

If the commitment was fulfilled, acknowledge the progress and encourage continued growth.

If it was not fulfilled, avoid criticism. Instead, explore what prevented the formandus from carrying it out. Often this leads to deeper self-understanding and a more realistic commitment for the future.

4. Keep Brief and Objective Notes

Short notes help the formator maintain continuity without reducing the accompaniment to a record of problems.

It is sufficient to note:

- the date of the session;
- the main themes discussed;
- significant insights;
- the commitment made;
- points for follow-up at the next session.

Notes should be factual, respectful, and securely stored. Avoid unnecessary details or personal comments that do not contribute to the accompaniment process.

5. Respect the Pace of Growth

Every formandus grows differently. Some changes become visible quickly, while others require months or even years of patient accompaniment.

Avoid:

- comparing one formandus with another;
- expecting immediate transformation;
- becoming discouraged by temporary setbacks.

Formation is a gradual work of grace and human cooperation. The formator’s role is to accompany faithfully, trusting that lasting growth often occurs quietly and progressively.

Practical Checklist for Reviewing Progress

At regular intervals, ask yourself:

- ✓ Is the formandus becoming more self-aware?
- ✓ Is he more open and honest during the sessions?
- ✓ Is he assuming greater responsibility for his growth?
- ✓ Are his decisions increasingly guided by Gospel values?
- ✓ Is there greater integration between his prayer, community life, and mission?
- ✓ What area should become the focus of the next session?

Formation Note: The fruit of Vocational Growth Sessions is not measured by the number of problems discussed but by the gradual emergence of a mature and integrated person. Faithful accompaniment helps the formandus grow in self-knowledge, emotional maturity, spiritual depth, and vocational commitment. By patiently reviewing progress, celebrating growth, and accompanying

ongoing struggles, the formator becomes a true collaborator with God's work of transformation in the life of the formandus.

IX. Common Mistakes Formators Should Avoid

Even experienced formators can unintentionally weaken the effectiveness of Vocational Growth Sessions through certain habits or attitudes. Most of these mistakes arise not from lack of goodwill but from the desire to help quickly or to solve problems immediately. Recognizing these common pitfalls enables the formator to accompany the formandus with greater wisdom, patience, and respect.

1. Talking More Than Listening

A Vocational Growth Session should primarily be the formandus' conversation, not the formator's lecture.

When the formator speaks too much, explains at length, or dominates the conversation, the formandus has little opportunity to reflect on his own experiences. Genuine growth occurs when the formandus is helped to discover the truth for himself.

Instead of asking: *"Did I explain enough?"* ask: *"Did I listen enough?"*

2. Giving Advice Too Quickly

The first responsibility of the formator is to understand before offering solutions.

When advice is given too early, the formandus may become dependent on the formator instead of learning to discern and decide responsibly. Often, what appears to be the problem is only the surface issue. Patient listening frequently reveals deeper questions that need attention.

Ask yourself:

- Does he need advice?
- Or does he first need to be understood?

3. Asking Too Many Questions

Questions are essential, but too many questions can make the session feel like an interrogation.

Rather than moving rapidly from one question to another, ask one meaningful question and allow the formandus time to reflect.

Sometimes a brief silence after a good question is more fruitful than asking three additional ones.

4. Judging Instead of Understanding

It is easy to evaluate behaviour before understanding the person's experience.

For example, instead of immediately concluding that a formandus is lazy, irresponsible, or uncooperative, explore what may be contributing to the behaviour.

Questions such as, *"Help me understand what happened,"* are often more helpful than, *"Why did you do that again?"*

Understanding does not excuse inappropriate behaviour, but it provides the foundation for meaningful growth.

5. Focusing Only on Behaviour

Visible behaviour is important, but it is only one part of the person's story.

The formator should also explore:

- motivations;
- emotions;
- fears;
- expectations;
- values;
- spiritual struggles.

The goal is not simply to change behaviour but to help the formandus grow as a person.

6. Trying to Control the Formandus

The purpose of accompaniment is to foster responsible freedom, not dependence.

Avoid making decisions that properly belong to the formandus or expecting unquestioning agreement with every suggestion.

Instead, help him:

- reflect;
- discern;
- decide responsibly;
- accept the consequences of his choices.

Formation aims at mature adults, not passive followers.

7. Ignoring the Emotional Dimension

Some formators focus almost exclusively on prayer, studies, discipline, or ministry while overlooking the emotional life of the formandus.

Yet emotions often influence:

- relationships;
- community life;
- vocational perseverance;
- prayer;
- ministry.

Helping the formandus recognize and integrate his emotions is an important part of integral formation.

8. Neglecting Follow-up

A good session loses much of its value if it is never revisited.

Failing to review previous conversations or commitments may unintentionally communicate that the sessions are isolated events rather than part of a continuous journey.

Beginning each meeting with a brief review of the previous one strengthens continuity and accountability.

9. Breaking Confidentiality

Trust is the foundation of every Vocational Growth Session.

Sharing personal information casually, even with good intentions, can seriously damage the accompaniment relationship.

The formator should always exercise discretion while observing the safeguarding policies and procedures of the Church and the institute whenever serious concerns require responsible intervention.

Practical Self-Assessment for Formators

After each Vocational Growth Session, ask yourself:

- ✓ Did I listen more than I spoke?
- ✓ Did I seek to understand before offering advice?
- ✓ Did I respect the pace of the formandus?
- ✓ Did I encourage him to think for himself?
- ✓ Did we identify one practical step for growth?
- ✓ What should I follow up during the next session?

Formation Note: A good formator is not one who has all the answers but one who creates the conditions in which the formandus can encounter the truth about himself in the presence of God. Humility, attentive listening, patient questioning, and respect for the person's freedom are often more formative than lengthy explanations or ready-made solutions. By avoiding these common mistakes, Vocational Growth Sessions become genuine moments of accompaniment that foster lasting personal and vocational growth.

X. When Additional Help Is Needed

Vocational Growth Sessions are a valuable means of accompaniment, but they are not designed to address every personal difficulty. Some situations require the support of other qualified persons. Recognizing these limits is an important responsibility of every formator.

A wise formator knows when to continue accompanying the formandus personally and when to seek additional help. Referring a formandus for specialized assistance is not a sign of failure; rather, it reflects a commitment to his integral well-being.

1. Know the Limits of Vocational Growth Sessions

The primary purpose of VGS is to foster:

- self-awareness;
- personal integration;
- vocational discernment;
- emotional and spiritual growth;
- responsible decision-making.

They are **not** intended to provide professional psychotherapy, psychiatric treatment, or specialized trauma care.

The formator should avoid attempting to resolve issues that require professional competence beyond his training.

2. Situations That May Require Referral

Consider seeking additional assistance when the formandus shows signs of:

- persistent or severe depression;
- suicidal thoughts or self-harming behaviour;
- serious anxiety that significantly impairs daily functioning;
- traumatic experiences that remain unresolved;

- addiction to alcohol, drugs, gambling, pornography, or digital media;
- repeated episodes of emotional instability that do not improve through ordinary accompaniment;
- symptoms suggestive of severe psychological or psychiatric disorders;
- experiences of abuse or safeguarding concerns;
- any situation where the safety of the formandus or others may be at risk.

These situations require timely and appropriate intervention.

3. Distinguish Different Roles

Integral formation often involves collaboration among several persons, each with a distinct responsibility.

Person	Primary Role
Formator	Accompanies the formandus in human, spiritual, and vocational growth through regular formation conversations.
Spiritual Director	Helps the formandus discern God's action in his spiritual life and deepen his relationship with Christ.
Psychologist or Counsellor	Assesses and treats psychological difficulties using professional methods appropriate to the person's needs.
Superior	Exercises governance, makes decisions for the good of the individual and the community, and ensures that formation policies are implemented.

These roles complement one another and should never be confused.

4. Refer with Sensitivity

When referral is needed, explain it in a supportive and respectful manner.

For example: "Some of what you are experiencing would benefit from the help of someone with specialized training. I will continue accompanying you, but I believe it would also be helpful for you to speak with a qualified professional."

This approach reassures the formandus that referral is an expression of care rather than rejection.

5. Continue the Accompaniment

Referral does not end the formator's responsibility.

Even when another professional becomes involved, the formator continues to accompany the formandus in his vocational journey by:

- encouraging him;
- helping him integrate new insights into daily life;
- maintaining appropriate communication within professional and ethical boundaries;
- respecting confidentiality and safeguarding requirements.

Professional treatment and vocational accompaniment should support one another.

Practical Guidelines

When you are uncertain:

- Do not ignore serious warning signs.
- Do not attempt to diagnose psychological disorders.

- Do not promise absolute confidentiality when safety is at risk.
- Consult the competent authority according to the policies of the Church and the institute.
- Continue accompanying the formandus with compassion and hope.

Remember: *A timely referral is often one of the most caring decisions a formator can make.*

Formation Note: The ministry of accompaniment calls the formator to recognize both his responsibilities and his limits. Vocational Growth Sessions remain a privileged space for discernment and growth, but they cannot replace professional psychological care or other specialized interventions when these are needed. A mature formator accompanies with humility, collaborates with other professionals when appropriate, and always seeks the integral good of the formandus. Such collaboration safeguards both the person and the integrity of the formation process.

XI. Record Keeping and Follow-up

Vocational Growth Sessions are part of a continuing process of accompaniment. Brief and well-organized records help the formator maintain continuity, monitor growth, and prepare for future sessions. Record keeping is not an administrative exercise but a practical aid that enables the formator to accompany each formandus with greater attentiveness and consistency.

The purpose of these records is not to create a detailed personal file but to preserve the key elements that support ongoing formation.

1. Record Only What Is Necessary

Notes should be brief, objective, and relevant to the formation process.

After each session, it is usually sufficient to record:

- the date of the session;
- the main themes discussed;
- significant insights or areas of growth;
- the practical commitment agreed upon;
- points to be followed up in the next session.

Avoid writing lengthy descriptions or recording unnecessary personal details that do not contribute to the accompaniment process.

2. Write Objective Observations

Records should distinguish between **observable facts** and **personal interpretations**.

For example: Instead of writing: *“He is immature and irresponsible.”* Write: *“He reported difficulty managing his daily schedule and arrived late for community prayer on several occasions. We discussed practical ways of improving time management.”*

Objective observations are more helpful for future accompaniment and avoid unfair judgments.

3. Protect Confidentiality

Session notes should be treated with the same discretion as the conversation itself.

Therefore:

- keep records in a secure place;
- do not allow unauthorized access;
- never use the notes for casual discussion;

- share information only when legitimately required according to the policies of the Church and the institute.

Respect for confidentiality strengthens trust and protects the dignity of the formandus.

4. Review Notes Before the Next Session

Before meeting the formandus again, briefly review the previous record.

Ask yourself:

- What commitment did he make?
- What progress has he reported?
- Which issues still require attention?
- Is there a recurring pattern that deserves further reflection?

This preparation enables the accompaniment to remain continuous rather than fragmented.

5. Use Records to Discern Growth

Over time, the notes provide a valuable overview of the formandus' journey.

They may reveal:

- recurring themes;
- gradual changes in attitudes;
- increasing self-awareness;
- areas where additional support is needed;
- significant milestones in vocational growth.

Such patterns often become visible only when viewed over an extended period.

Suggested Session Record

Item	Notes
Date	
Main themes discussed	
Significant insights	
Strengths observed	
Areas for growth	
Practical commitment	
Follow-up for next session	

This simple format is usually sufficient for maintaining continuity without becoming burdensome.

Practical Tips

After every VGS:

- Complete your notes as soon as possible.
- Keep them brief and factual.
- Record growth as well as difficulties.
- Review them before the next meeting.
- Store them securely.

Remember: *Good records support good accompaniment; they should never replace personal attentiveness or become instruments of judgment.*

Formation Note: Record keeping serves the ministry of accompaniment by preserving continuity and helping the formator recognize the gradual work of God's grace in the life of the formandus. Used wisely and confidentially, simple records become a valuable tool for discerning growth, planning future accompaniment, and ensuring that Vocational Growth Sessions remain a coherent journey rather than isolated conversations. They should always respect the dignity, privacy, and freedom of the formandus while supporting his integral formation.

XII. Sample Vocational Growth Sessions

Reading about accompaniment is helpful, but seeing it practiced is often even more valuable. The following examples illustrate how a formator can guide a conversation from **sharing** to **reflection, discernment, and practical commitment**. They are not scripts to be followed mechanically but models that demonstrate attitudes, listening skills, and questions that foster genuine growth.

Example 1: Difficulty in Community Life

Situation: A formandus feels ignored during community discussions and has begun withdrawing from community activities.

Formator: *How have things been since our last session?*

Formandus: *I'm fine... but honestly, I don't feel like participating in community meetings anymore.*

Formator: *Tell me more about that.*

Formandus: *Whenever I share my ideas, no one seems interested.*

Formator: *You feel that your contributions are not being valued.*

Formandus: *Yes. After a while I thought, "Why should I even speak?"*

Formator: *How has that affected you?*

Formandus: *I've become quieter and I avoid discussions.*

Formator: *Do you think this experience is only about others not listening, or could there also be some expectations within you that deserve reflection?*

(Pause)

Formandus: *Perhaps I expect people to agree with me more than I realize.*

Formator: *What might God be inviting you to learn through this experience?*

Formandus: *Maybe to listen more patiently to others instead of expecting immediate appreciation.*

Formator: *What would be one practical step before our next meeting?*

Formandus: *I'll participate in the next community meeting with the intention of listening carefully before expressing my own views.*

Example 2: Struggle with Personal Prayer

Situation: A formandus has become irregular in personal prayer.

Formator: *How has your prayer been recently?*

Formandus: *Not very good. I've missed several periods of meditation.*

Formator: *What usually happens when you miss prayer?*

Formandus: *I tell myself I'm too busy.*

Formator: *What do you think is happening beneath that explanation?*

(Silence)

Formandus: *I think I've been discouraged lately. Sometimes prayer feels empty.*

Formator: *Thank you for sharing that honestly. Have you experienced this before?*

Formandus: *Yes, especially when I feel I'm not making progress.*

Formator: *What might the Lord be inviting you to discover during this period of dryness?*

Formandus: *Perhaps to remain faithful even when I don't feel anything.*

Formator: *What simple commitment would help you this week?*

Formandus: *I'll spend fifteen minutes each morning in silent prayer without worrying about whether I feel anything.*

Example 3: Difficulty Accepting Correction

Situation: A formandus reacts defensively whenever he receives correction.

Formator: *I've noticed that correction often seems difficult for you. How do you experience it?*

Formandus: *I immediately feel that I've disappointed people.*

Formator: *What emotions come up at those moments?*

Formandus: *Mostly shame... and sometimes anger.*

Formator: *Have you experienced similar feelings earlier in your life?*

Formandus: *My father expected perfection. Whenever I made mistakes, I felt I wasn't good enough.*

Formator: *That helps us understand why correction feels so painful. How might this experience be influencing your present relationships?*

Formandus: *Perhaps I'm reacting to old memories rather than to the present situation.*

Formator: *How might the Lord be inviting you to experience correction differently?*

Formandus: *As an opportunity to grow rather than as a rejection.*

Formator: *What will you practice before our next meeting?*

Formandus: *When I receive correction, I'll pause before reacting and ask myself what I can learn from it.*

Learning Points from These Examples

Notice how each conversation follows a similar pattern:

1. The formandus shares an experience.
2. The formator listens attentively.
3. Reflection deepens through thoughtful questions.
4. Human experience is connected with spiritual discernment.
5. The session concludes with one concrete commitment for growth.

The emphasis is not on providing quick answers but on helping the formandus discover deeper meaning and take responsibility for his own growth.

Formation Note: No two Vocational Growth Sessions will be identical because every formandus has a unique personality, history, and vocational journey. Effective accompaniment therefore requires flexibility, patience, and discernment. These examples illustrate a process rather than a formula. The formator's task is not to follow a script but to accompany each formandus with attentive listening, thoughtful questioning, and confidence that the Holy Spirit is the principal guide in every authentic journey of formation.

Conclusion

Vocational Growth Sessions are among the most valuable means of personalized formation. More than scheduled conversations, they are privileged moments of accompaniment in which the formator helps the formandus understand himself more deeply, discern God's presence in his life, and grow toward greater human and vocational maturity.

The effectiveness of these sessions does not depend primarily on sophisticated techniques but on the quality of the relationship between the formator and the formandus. A formator who listens attentively, asks thoughtful questions, respects the person's freedom, and accompanies with patience creates an environment where genuine transformation can take place.

Throughout this module, we have seen that effective Vocational Growth Sessions require careful preparation, a climate of trust, attentive listening, reflective dialogue, spiritual discernment, practical follow-up, and continuity. They invite the formandus to move gradually from **experience to reflection, from reflection to discernment, and from discernment to concrete action**. In this way, everyday experiences become opportunities for growth in self-awareness, emotional maturity, Gospel values, and vocational commitment.

Growth, however, is seldom immediate. It unfolds through repeated encounters, honest reflection, faithful accompaniment, and the quiet action of God's grace. The formator's task is therefore not to produce quick results but to accompany patiently, trusting that the Holy Spirit is the principal guide in every authentic process of formation.

When Vocational Growth Sessions become a regular and integral part of formation, they foster formandi who are increasingly self-aware, emotionally balanced, spiritually grounded, and capable of making responsible decisions. Such men are better prepared to embrace their missionary vocation with freedom, generosity, and perseverance.

Ultimately, the goal of every Vocational Growth Session is not merely to solve problems but to help the formandus become the person God is calling him to be. By faithfully accompanying him along this journey, the formator participates in the Church's mission of forming mature disciples and joyful missionaries who, transformed by the Gospel, are ready to place their gifts at the service of God's people.

Reflective Questions for Formators

1. How regularly do I conduct Vocational Growth Sessions, and do I give them the priority they deserve within the formation programme?
2. How well do I prepare myself—spiritually, emotionally, and practically—before meeting a formandus?
3. During a typical VGS, do I spend more time listening than speaking? What does this reveal about my style of accompaniment?
4. How effectively do I create an atmosphere of trust where the formandus feels safe to speak honestly about his struggles, doubts, and hopes?
5. When I encounter resistance or defensiveness, do I respond with patience and understanding, or do I become impatient or directive?
6. To what extent do I help the formandus move beyond describing events to recognizing the deeper motivations, emotions, and values that shape his behaviour?
7. How do I integrate human, psychological, and spiritual dimensions during accompaniment without reducing the conversation to only one of these aspects?
8. Do I encourage the formandus to take responsibility for his own growth, or do I tend to solve problems and make decisions on his behalf?
9. How consistently do I follow up on the commitments made during previous sessions?
10. Am I attentive to the limits of my competence, recognizing situations that require the support of a spiritual director, psychologist, or other qualified professionals?

11. Looking back over the formandi I have accompanied, what practices have been most helpful in fostering genuine vocational growth? What aspects of my accompaniment still need to develop?
12. In what ways can I continue growing as an accompanier so that my Vocational Growth Sessions become ever more effective moments of discernment, personal integration, and missionary formation?

Appendix: Practical Tools for Vocational Growth Sessions

Appendix A. A Simple Flow of a Vocational Growth Session

A one-page visual guide that the formator can consult before every session.

Step	Focus	Key Question
1	Welcome	How are you today?
2	Sharing	What has been most significant since we last met?
3	Listening	What is the formandus really experiencing?
4	Exploring	What lies beneath this experience?
5	Discernment	What is God inviting him to discover?
6	Commitment	What one concrete step will he take?
7	Summary	What have we discovered today?
8	Closing	Prayer and encouragement

This could even be presented as a simple flowchart.

Appendix B. Suggested Questions Bank

One of the greatest difficulties inexperienced formators face is knowing **what to ask**. A bank of reflective questions would be extremely useful.

Prayer

- How has your prayer been recently?
- When do you feel closest to God?
- What distracts you most in prayer?
- What is God teaching you these days?

Community

- How are your relationships in the community?
- Where do you experience joy?
- Where do you struggle most?
- Is there anyone you are avoiding?

Mission

- What ministry has given you life recently?
- What drains your energy?
- What have you learned about yourself through ministry?

Personal Growth

- What has challenged you recently?
- What have you discovered about yourself?
- Which personal quality is growing?
- Which weakness keeps recurring?

Vocation

- How do you experience God's call today?
- What gives you hope?

- What raises questions within you?
- What strengthens your vocational commitment?

Appendix C. Sample Session Record

Instead of lengthy notes, provide a simple form.

Vocational Growth Session Record

Date:

Main themes:

Important insights:

Strengths observed:

Areas needing growth:

Commitment agreed:

Follow-up next session:

One page only.

Appendix D. Signs of Healthy Vocational Growth

A quick reference.

Is the formandus becoming...

- ☐ More self-aware
- ☐ More open
- ☐ More responsible
- ☐ More emotionally balanced
- ☐ More prayerful
- ☐ More cooperative
- ☐ More capable of handling feedback
- ☐ More vocationally committed

This could become an evaluation tool for the formation team.

Appendix E. When to Refer

A simple decision guide.

Situation	Continue VGS	Refer
Ordinary struggles	✓	
Community conflicts	✓	
Prayer difficulties	✓	
Persistent trauma		✓
Severe depression		✓
Addiction		✓
Self-harm		✓
Psychotic symptoms		✓

Very practical.

Appendix F. Do's and Don'ts

This could become the page every formator photocopies.

Do

- Pray before every session.
- Listen patiently.
- Ask open questions.
- Respect silence.
- Follow up previous commitments.
- Encourage responsible freedom.
- Keep brief notes.
- Respect confidentiality.

Don't

- Dominate the conversation.
- Give premature advice.
- Judge the person.
- Solve every problem.
- Force sensitive topics.
- Break confidentiality.
- Ignore safeguarding concerns.
- Forget to follow up.

Appendix G. Checklist Before Every VGS

A one-minute preparation tool.

Before today's session...

- ☐ I have prayed.
- ☐ I reviewed the previous session.
- ☐ I know what needs follow-up.
- ☐ I am free from distractions.
- ☐ I am ready to listen more than speak.
- ☐ I will accompany, not control.

Appendix H. Suggested Themes for Vocational Growth Sessions Across the Stages of Formation

While the fundamental purpose of Vocational Growth Sessions remains the same throughout formation, their focus should evolve according to the developmental stage of the formandus. As the person matures, the themes of accompaniment gradually move from adaptation and self-discovery to vocational integration, missionary identity, and lifelong commitment.

The following suggestions are intended as a practical guide rather than a fixed programme. Formators should adapt them to the individual needs of each formandus and the particular context of formation.

Stage of Formation	Primary Goal	Suggested Themes for VGS
Aspirancy / Pre-Novitiate	Self-discovery and vocational readiness	Self-knowledge; family relationships; personal history; motivation for religious life; emotional awareness; habits of prayer; adaptation to community life; responsibility; interpersonal relationships; use of social media; healthy lifestyle; openness to formation.

Novitiate	Deepening vocational identity and initial integration	Experience of God; vocational discernment; evangelical counsels; emotional integration; personal freedom; simplicity of life; community living; obedience; affective maturity; self-discipline; apostolic availability; growth in missionary spirituality.
Post-Novitiate (Philosophy / Initial Formation)	Human integration and missionary formation	Personal identity; affective and psychosexual maturity; interpersonal relationships; intercultural and intergenerational living; community responsibility; study habits; intellectual formation; missionary motivation; emotional resilience; discernment in daily life; leadership potential; healthy boundaries.
Theology / Immediate Preparation for Perpetual Profession or Ordination	Integration for lifelong missionary commitment	Missionary identity; pastoral maturity; celibate integration; authority and service; collaboration in ministry; community leadership; pastoral relationships; decision-making; handling success and failure; missionary availability; lifelong formation; perseverance; vocational fidelity.
Ongoing Formation	Renewal and lifelong growth	Fidelity to vocation; integration of prayer and mission; community relationships; leadership challenges; emotional well-being; work-life balance; missionary zeal; dealing with loneliness or burnout; continuing conversion; accompaniment of others; healthy ageing; ongoing discernment.

Adapting the Themes

Although each stage has its own priorities, accompaniment should always remain person-centred rather than programme-centred. Two formandi at the same stage may require attention to very different areas of growth. The formator should therefore use these themes as reference points while remaining attentive to the concrete experiences, challenges, and graces present in the life of each individual.

At times, an unexpected event, a family crisis, a community conflict, a vocational doubt, an apostolic success, or a significant spiritual experience, may become the most appropriate focus of a Vocational Growth Session. Such moments often provide unique opportunities for deeper discernment and integration.

Formation Note: Formation unfolds as a gradual journey toward mature missionary discipleship. Accordingly, Vocational Growth Sessions should accompany the developmental needs of each stage while always respecting the unique rhythm of the individual formandus. As priorities change throughout formation, the ultimate objective remains constant: to help the formandus grow in self-knowledge, personal integration, freedom, vocational clarity, and joyful commitment to Christ and the missionary vocation.

Further Reading

- Babu Sebastian, CMF. *From Restoration of the Self to the Recovery of Human Mystery*. Bengaluru: Institute of Formative Psychology, 2025. (Especially the chapters on Vocational Growth Sessions and the pedagogical encounter.)
- Cencini, Amedeo. *The Way of Accompaniment: Growing in Wisdom and Spirit*. New York: Paulist Press, 2016.

- Cencini, Amedeo. *Formation Journey: Handbook for Directors of Formation*. New York: Paulist Press, 2006.
- Rulla, Luigi M. *Depth Psychology and Vocation: A Psycho-Social Perspective*. Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1971.
- Rulla, Luigi M., Joyce Ridick, and Franco Imoda. *Entering and Leaving Vocation: Intrapsychic Dynamics*. Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1976.
- Rulla, Luigi M. *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation. Vol. I: Interdisciplinary Bases*. Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1986.
- Rulla, Luigi M., Joyce Ridick, and Franco Imoda. *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation. Vol. II: Existential Confirmation*. Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1986 (some bibliographies list a 1989 publication because of a later printing).
- Imoda, Franco. *Sviluppo umano, psicologia e mistero [Human Development, Psychology and Mystery]*. Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 2005.
- Imoda, Franco. *Beyond Fragmentation: Integrating the Human Person*. Leuven: Peeters, 2015.